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Nearly 400 local educators receive preliminary pink slips by Monday deadline

By J.M. BROWN

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SANTA CRUZ - Just shy of 400 local K-12 teachers and other certificated employees received preliminary layoff notices by Monday's state-mandated deadline, education officials reported.

The 396 employees who received pink slips eliminating their jobs or cutting their hours for next fall represent the highest number in recent years, topping the 385 notices sent out last year. The figures represent the number of people affected by the cuts, not the number of positions cut, which is significantly lower because a number of employees work part time. The cuts also don't include the number of non-teaching cuts districts will weigh in coming days.

Many of the teaching pink slips are likely to be rescinded once districts have a clearer picture about the number of retirements and resignations are in the pipeline. But teachers and administrators agree the cuts, even if preliminary, destroy morale.

The county's two largest districts, Pajaro Valley Unified and Santa Cruz City Schools, sent notices to 275 and 80 employees, respectively, on top of a combined total of 120 adult education workers. Both districts have made cuts of about 10 percent in K-

12 expenses and gutted adult education programs in the face of record slashing from a state mired in \$20 billion of red ink.

"It's huge," said Barry Kirschen, president of the Greater Santa Cruz Federation of Teachers, saying the district sent out more notices than necessary. Administrators say the March 15 deadline requires them to send out as many preliminary notices as they think they could need to balance the budget absent a cost-saving deal with teachers.

Monday, the two sides tentatively agreed on a retirement incentive plan that will reduce the layoffs if approved by the school board. Forty-one teachers agreed to retire at the end of the school year under an offer to pay them 80 percent of their final salaries over time. In exchange, the district will cap K-3 class sizes at an average of 23 students per teacher, which is an increase of three from the current ratio.

Kirschen said the retirements will equal nearly \$900,000 in savings, or about 15 percent of the \$5.4 million the district needs to trim. But Tanya Krause, the district's assistant superintendent of human resources, said saving that much also would have meant laying off counselors with less seniority than some junior teachers who could be saved by the retirements - a trade-off she said the district isn't willing to live with.

In the meantime, both sides said they are getting closer to a furlough agreement that could mean nearly an additional \$1 million in savings. Teachers are willing to take a reduction in work days, but details are still being negotiated.

"We will have some calendar concessions, but I just don't know how many and where on the calendar," Krause said.

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Soquel Union Elementary School District is also weighing furloughs to reduce layoffs. The district sent 25 pink slips after having cut the equivalent of 16 full-time positions to save \$1.5 million, or about 10 percent of last year's budget.

In Scotts Valley, where the budget had to be cut 9 percent, K-3 classes are growing to an average of 29 students, which led the school board to cut the equivalent of six elementary teaching positions. There were also cuts at the high school level, but retirements and other personnel changes brought the number of total workers who actually received a pink slip to eight, Superintendent Susan Silver said.

Ann Codd, head of the Scotts Valley teachers union, said she believes the district worked hard not to send out more notices than absolutely necessary. But the sting of getting a pink slip is still devastating, she said, especially when there are few teaching jobs elsewhere.

"It's still really tough because some of these teachers are already part-time teachers because of previous reductions," Codd said. "We understand it doesn't come from the district, but rather the state's mess."

Statewide, districts have cut 22,000 teachers and other certificated employees. Sixty percent of workers cut last year were later brought back, but education officials expect a greater number of notices to be made permanent this year due to a fourth consecutive year of deep state cuts.

Monday, the state's Recovery Task Force Director Herb K. Schultz urged Washington to send the second round of stabilization funds that are part of President Obama's federal stimulus package. The U. S. Department of Education, which requires states to maintain education funding to be eligible for the

money, has raised concerns about the California's record of cutting schools to balance its budget.

"California has met all federal requirements for the second distribution of stimulus funding for education," Schultz said in a prepared statement. "I am disheartened that anyone would try to stand in the way of securing nearly a half a billion dollars in critical funding for our education system during these difficult economic times."

The Associated Press contributed to this report.

Preliminary pink slips

Below are the numbers of preliminary layoff notices issued in K-12 local public school districts by Monday, which was the statewide deadline for issuing pink slips to teachers, administrators and other certificated staff. The figures represent the number of employees who were sent layoff notices, not the number of positions cut, and do not include Adult Education teachers.

Pajaro Valley Unified School District: 275

Santa Cruz City Schools: 80

Scotts Valley Unified School District: 8

San Lorenzo Valley Unified School District: 3

Soquel Union Elementary School District: 25

Live Oak School District: 2

County Office of Education: 3

Four small school districts: 0

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TOTAL: 396

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